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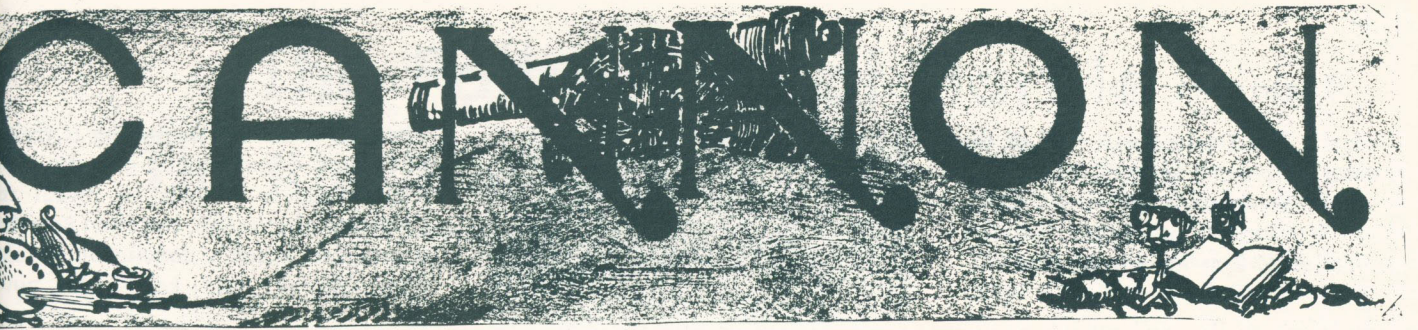
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In the Beginning

by Chaim Potok

reviewed by Jack Mouw

Chaim Potok's latest novel, **In the Beginning**, is in the same style as his earlier book, **My Name is Asher Lev**. Once again Potok writes about Jewish

boys growing up in New York City. Asher Lev was a precocious and brilliant painter; David Lurie, the protagonist of **In the Beginning**, is a

brilliant student.

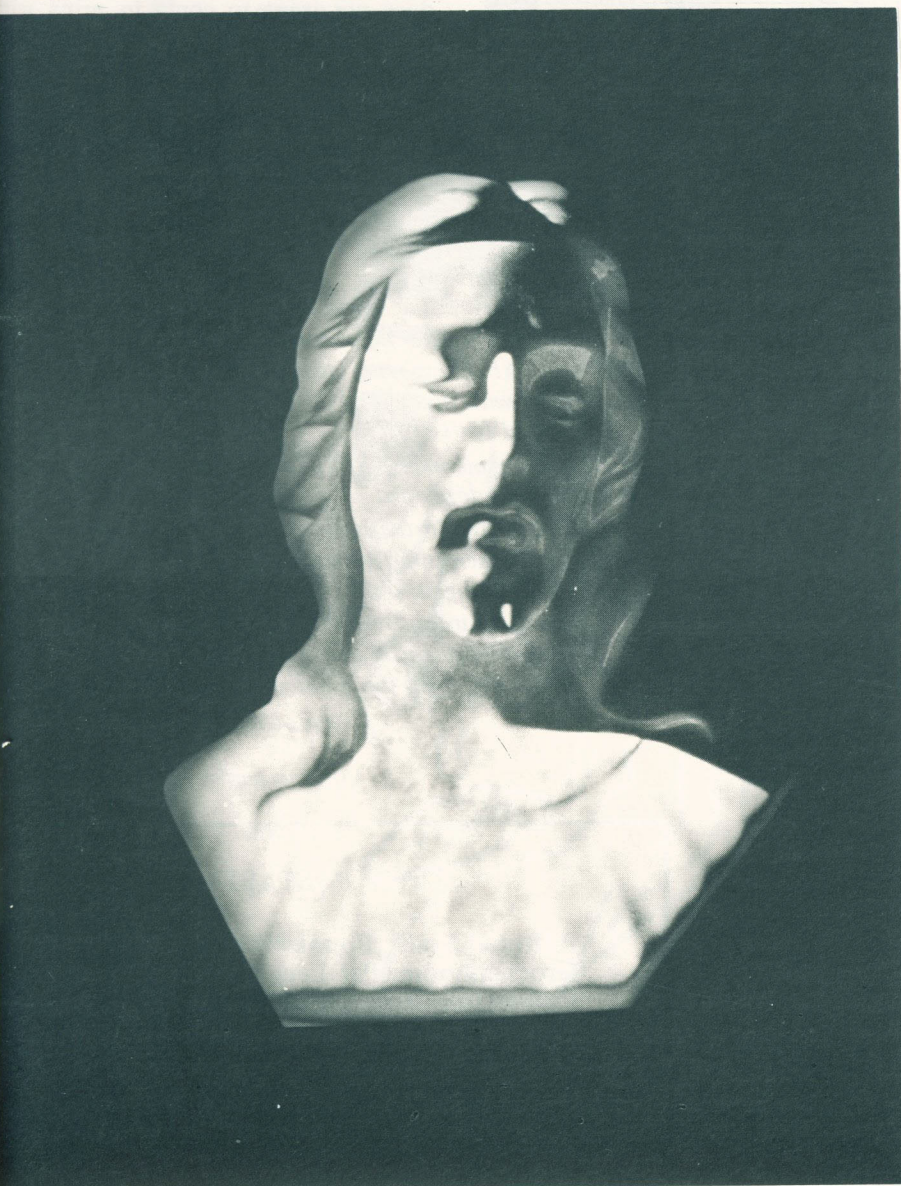
Potok tries to plumb the cosmic depths of human depravity, but always from a distance. His characters are not depraved; they are the victims of the depravity around them. The title invites comparison with the book of Genesis, with an implicit creation and a literal fall. David Lurie's mother trips when she is carrying him into the house, and he suffers some sort of facial deformity that makes him susceptible to every disease that comes along. This is the first accident of a series that mar his childhood. David accidentally lets the canary fly through an open window and escape, and he accidentally makes a dog get run over by a car. These episodes haunt little David. Why does God let accidents happen?

David's personal problems are paralleled by a secondary plot that involves the fate of all Jews, and more specifically his relatives in Europe. This secondary plot reaches a climax in 1945, when the German concentration camps come to light, and none of the relatives have survived. This too is an accident, one of catastrophic proportions.

Potok is not just writing about Jews: his theme is universal; the Jews are a prototype of twentieth century man, and their centuries-old predicament is now everyone's predicament. The course of history has assumed a life of its own and gone on without us, leaving all men homeless. Traditional Judaism and traditional Christianity have to be reinterpreted, they have to adapt themselves to a changed world.

That is why Potok makes David Lurie a genius. Potok knows that readers find it hard to identify themselves with a genius. Who can feel comfortable with a boy who writes matter-of-factly, "That summer I began to read

(Continued on page 2)



Statue No. 2

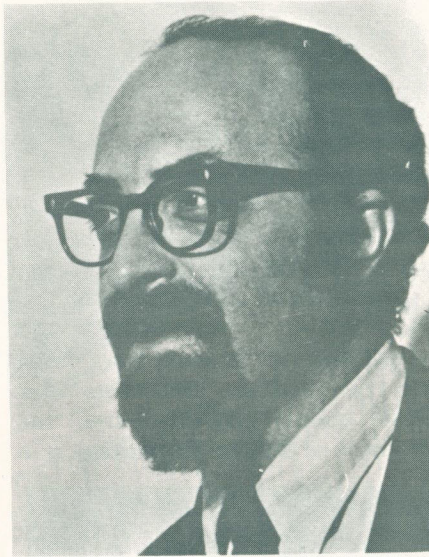
by Dave Groenenboom

Beginning cont.

Gibbon's **The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire**."? (p. 399) But David has to be a genius to carry out Potok's plan for redeeming man. David's teacher gives him his commission:

"I want to know if the religious worldview has any meaning today. Bring yourself back an answer to that, Lurie. Take apart the Bible and see if it is something more today than the **Iliad** and the **Odyssey**. . . Study Kierkegaard and Otto and William James. Study man, Lurie. Study philosophy of religion." (p. 435)

This is pretty heady stuff for a novel, hardly a universal solution to a universal dilemma. Potok doesn't really offer a solution, he just plots the necessary course toward finding one.



The end of **In the Beginning** is tragic but Potok doesn't mean it to be. It's tragic because it fails to reveal the Christian alternative, but then very few novels do. Potok's conclusion is also disappointing, and keeps the novel from that mysterious classification "great novel", because it so naively reaffirms a faith in intellectual activity to find ultimate answers, a faith that the spirits of the twentieth century have long since discarded. Potok is not in touch with the times. Modern man doesn't wrestle with the question of the Bible's meaning for life; the answer to that has already been decided. Potok does not want to come to grips with the post-Christian man, and who can blame Him?

CHAFF

Chaff.

*Sorted and sifted,
good from bad when God brings Judgement.
Sordid and twisted,
victims from villains when we done it for him.*

*Driving the supposed chaff from us,
with our own hot air
in the stead of the appointed four winds
of the Revelation,
we often trample the elect-yet-unconfessed
as Pearls before Swine;
forgetting what pearls look like
from the outside of the oyster.*

*The Silo Barn is
filled with fat-bellied wheat;
layer upon layer
prouder upon proud: stacked in pews.
We reach the advantage of the Silo Top;
yet from greatest to least
we are carpeted wall to wall,
suspended by the Chaff
pressed into the damp dirt reality . . .
the poisonous sadness fermenting
in every crack Chaff fills.*

*Settled wheat
ground to bits under so much pressure
looks like any chaff hogs walk on.*

-Neil Culbertson

THOUGHTS

*Thoughts are like strawberries;
Juicy red with anticipation
Almost bursting with ideas
Pitted with inklings of desires, hopes
and fears
Picked sometimes when pale pink and
underdeveloped
Lying rotten in the back of the mind
Bits of green interference topping it all off
Dirtied by black soil
Washed clean by fresh rain
Growing beautiful sweet and wholesome
With aid from the Light and warmth of the Son.*

-Mary Klay

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The Fall & Rise of Harold

The Kindhearted Owl

by Dave Groenenboom

In times past, before the Great War, when the earth was dominated by beasts, there was an owl named Harold. Harold was a good owl, well-intentioned and quite intelligent. Harold loved all the animals, especially the other owls, and wanted more than anything else to be wise enough to guide the beasts through the various complexities of

ancient life.

So Harold studied. He studied grammar, and he studied literature, and he studied psychology, and he studied biology. He studied philosophy, he studied theology, and he studied astronomy. In fact, he studied every subject known to man, plus a few others that have since passed into oblivion.

In fact, Harold was so preoccupied with his studies that he had little time for anything else. His hollow tree trunk became so cluttered with books and papers that he was forced to sleep out on a limb in the bright sunlight. He would awaken early in the evening, and after a brief but wholesome meal, would return to his tree-trunk study, where he would while away the hours reading by the few rays of dim moonlight filtering through the study's round doorway.

The other owls, busy making little owls and hatching plans for the future, thought Harold a queer sort of bird. "What kind of self-respecting owl would waste so much of God's precious time in a stinking, rotting tree?" they would ask among themselves. And they had a point.

But Harold didn't give a hoot what they thought. When twilight turned to night time, and the other owls would spend the balmy evenings perched high on the limbs of living trees, prophetically chanting, "Who? Who?", Harold would lift his fuzzy head from his books, puff his chest in pride, and exclaim to himself, "Me! That's who! I'll put an end to your idle question! Someday I'll be wise and you'll thank me!"

Well, Harold didn't notice at first, but his vision was failing. His eyes, strained from reading by dim moonlight for so many months, were no longer eagle-sharp. More and more often he would swoop down for his evening meal, only to find he had killed a large twig instead of a garter snake. Why, once he even mistook a baby kitten for a field mouse, an experience he never quite recovered from.

Harold wasn't too alarmed, however. Food was plentiful, and he didn't eat much anyway. Besides, he could still read, if he held the book close enough to his bleary eyes.

One day, much later, when Harold was nearly blind as a bat, he was flying around in search of his meal when he thought he spied a grumpy creeping through a grove. He dove, and flew SMACK! dab into a rather large tree. Harold the owl tumbled helplessly to the earth. When the other owls awoke, they found Harold, his left wing soaked with blood, lying in a heap of feathers on the baked earth.

(Continued on page 7)

a path y
ou follow,
a thousand
yous, crea
tures of a
caring King,
but you,
unconcerned,
reeking
self-love,
leave no
trail behind
you to en
able a sea
rching strang
er to find
the Way.
Instead he
passes you
by, unseeing,
sneezing
as at a puff
of dust and
you are held
responsible



Pat Leegwater

TAXI DRIVER

Hell hath no limits, nor is circumscribed. In one self place; for where we are is hell. And where hell is, must we ever be.

Doctor Faustus, 560
Christopher Marlowe

With thematic pessimism and an aura of ambient fatalism, **Taxi-driver** takes a distinctly original look at Gothic horror: a raw, burning look, "like a neonlit wound." It is perhaps the season's most audacious film in terms of what it seeks to say about American society.

By opening with the animal-like taxi-cab slowly emerging from the hell-fire mist, the director, Martin Scorsese, persuades us to accept the central situation --taxi-driving-- as reality... a reality in which taxis drive the paved streets of hell,—and New York is a bad place in hell to be—especiall for Travis, the lonely, broken hero, hero who is both good and bad, committing evil in order to annihilate evil. He is presented as a true "modern saint" caught in the perverse dream of the beauty and horror of the streets.

Travis is oppressed by the tormented city's squalor, abused and degraded by infernal fares. He keeps a journal of his obsessions, and his voiced over narration of his jottings double over the action and serves to reinforce the everyday agony of his death-life.

Loneliness has followed me my whole life...in cars and bars... everywhere. There's no escape from God's lonely man.

A store owner vents his pent-up fury by savagely beating a robber's corpse, an avenging fallen-angel of backlash, striking back at everything and everyone that can serve as an emblem for his impotence and frustration.

A shattered Travis sets off to purge from his psyche the two women who have rejected him: one, a tough bourgeois angel of purity who refuses to save him, the other, a twelve year old prostitute who refuses to allow herself to be saved by him. Neither saved nor Savior. Travis turns himself into a walking arsenal of guns and knives, a self trained Kamakaze in the cause of nihilistic vengeance.

All the animals come out at night...whores...junkies...some-day a real rain will come and wash all this scum off the streets.

Travis attempts an assassination. Spotted too early, he shifts and erupts into a gory mechanical surrealistic ballet. The ultra-violence slow and fast motion slaying of the pimp and his gangster cronies ends with the police gazing in on the half dead Travis as he raises his bloody dripping finger... points it at his head...and smilingly imitates the sound of a gun. What is shown throughout the film is a prolonged suicide: a murderous rampage, an all-too contemporary figure taking as many as possible down with him into the bottomless pit.

But *Taxi-driver* doesn't end there. Disparity enters in as Travis does not die as we expect him to. A kind of "grace" enters in and with it the film ends with a weakly ironic and very anti-climactic epilogue. Travis, the hero, is once again confronted by his angel of purity--the bourgeois one--whom he, this time, indifferently spurns. Just as in the beginning of the film, we watch a close-up of Travis's fiery eyes. Personifying the congenital cynicism of the film, Travis, although still living, remains a lonely man in hell.

The film is based on a screenplay by Paul Schrader, a graduate of Calvin College and one of the significant young screen writers in America today. Still in his twenties, Schrader has already written two books on film criticism and theory. One book deals with what Mr. Schrader refers to as the "transcendental style" in film; the other on "film noir," or the genre of all those moody, violent thrillers of the 40's.

The transcendental style, on the other hand is exemplified by such directors as Ozu from Japan, Dryer from Denmark (known primarily to some Dordt students for his film **Ordett** (The Word), and Bresson also from Denmark. The transcendental style in film seeks to reveal a transcendent reality entering in during some sort of disparity or "crack" in the film's everyday reality. A type of "grace" enters in after which a "stasis" is shown in such a way that in order for the viewer



Cybil Sheperd rejects Robert De Niro outside a porno theater, pushing him deeper into loneliness and psychosis.

Harv
(Jo

to accept what is happening in the stasis (usually at the end of the film), the viewer must also accept the fact that transcendence has also entered in.

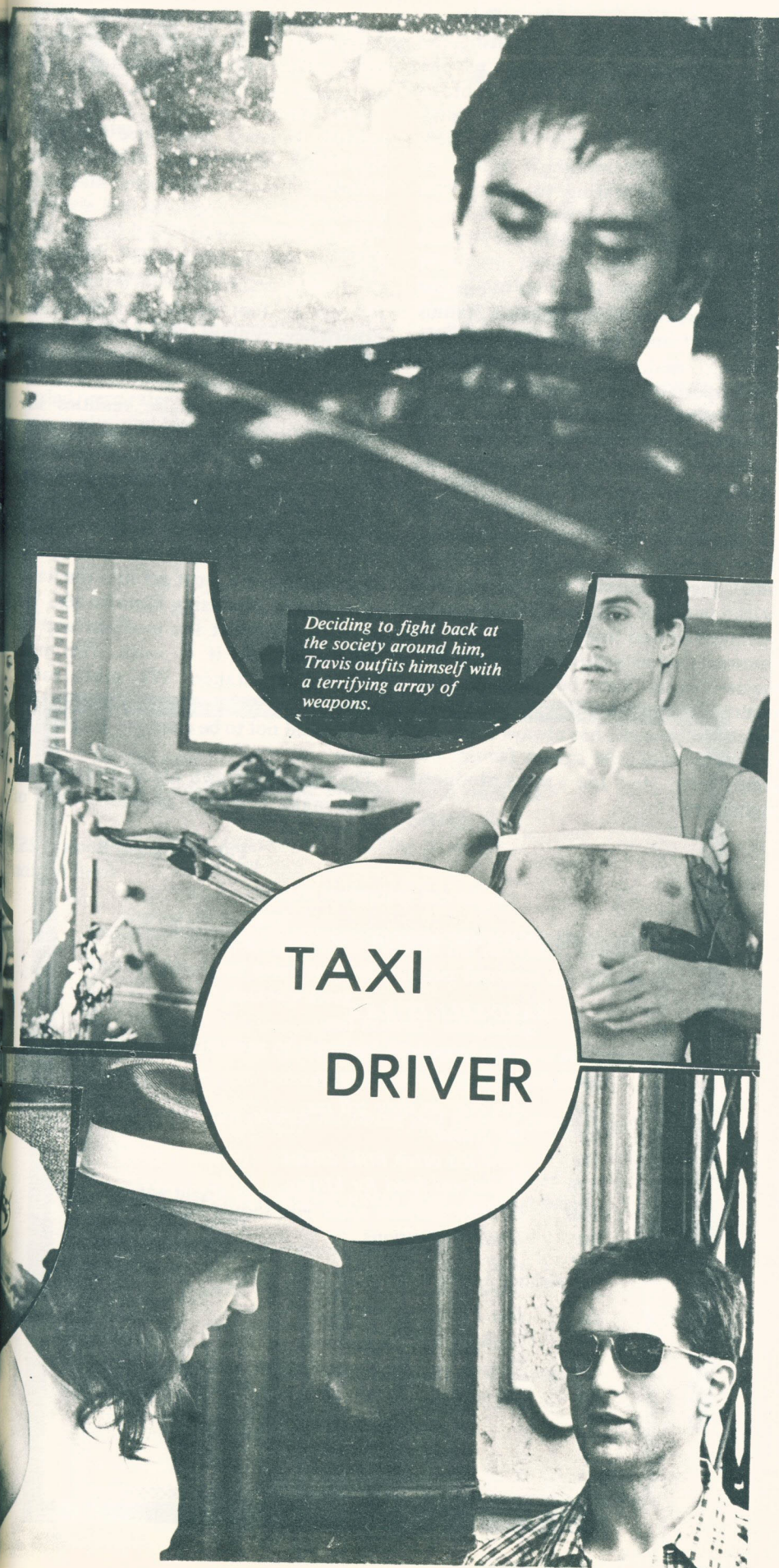
Taxi-driver, nicely enough, attempts to follow in the path of both genres.

Like most **noir** films, *Taxi-driver* takes place in an urban milieu, a sleazy New York City in hell, an Inferno populated by pimps and whores. Throughout the film, the aura of manace in its portrait of the city is retained, a quality that is absolutely indispensable for any **film noir**.

Like shoulder pads and zoot suits, **film noir** was an essential part of the 1940's outlook, a cinematic style forged in the fires of war, exile, and disillusion, a melodramatic reflection for a world gone mad. (One can see why this style should pop up again in the mid seventies).

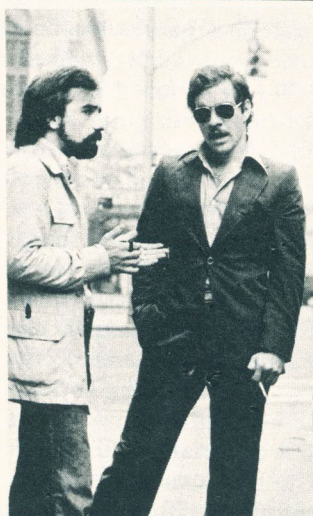
But Schrader seems to have aspired beyond the presumed limitation of the **noir** genre. Artistically the picture stands up very well and even if it is neck deep with those dark zoot suit thrillers, its head is breathing a combination of metaphors picked up from Dante, Dostoevsky, Calvin College (the Dutch names of the young prostitute's parents) and, not least of all, the transcendental film style. This is why: The action in the film is handled in essentially the same non-expressive manner; we do not look to camera angle and composition for "clues" to the action. This is referred to by Schrader as the "everyday" technique. It postpones emotional involvement. At this stage in the film we accept shots and scenes, yet are unable to understand their full purpose. By drawing attention to itself, the "everyday" stylization annuls our natural desire to participate vicariously in the action on the screen. "Everyday" is not a case of making us see life in a certain way rather it prevents us from seeing it as we are accustomed to. We desire to be distracted. And we will go to great lengths (fifty miles if we travel to Sioux City) to find a film, a movie, or even a flick which will allow us to interpret the action in a conventional manner. To be relieved. To rest. We do not want to confront a form which expresses the transcendent. (This may explain why so many people walk out of the film before it is finished.) The everyday blocks the emotional exits, preparing us for the disparity, the

(Continued on page 6)



decisive moment which follows the metaviolent scene-when we learn that Travis is living. Travis has been saved, not by the grace of God, but by the grace of a quirk in the system. The press makes him out to be a hero for killing some underworld figures. All the while our emotions have been superficially rejected and simultaneously tantalized by the disparity. If one accepts the ending, Travis alive and well and himself rejecting his angel of purity, the "stasis" of the transcendental style, then all is "grace", because it is "grace" which allows the protagonist and we the viewers to be both captive and free. According to her article in *Millimeter* magazine, (March '76), Ann Powel points out that *Taxi-driver* is semi-autobiographical.

Although Travis's actions and behavior aren't an obvious parallel to writer Paul Schrader's, his emotions and state of mind were similar to Schrader's at one point in his life. DeNiro (Travis) apparently modeled much of his character on the screenwriter and even wore a few of Schrader's personal effects, like his army boots and belt, during the shooting. DeNiro once said that Schrader used his talent the way Travis used a gun: to get people to listen to him.



Martin Scorsese and

Paul Schrader

There is also in *Taxi-driver*, a quick, satirical observation, a sense of meanness to match the meanness of the world it is showing, a correct assumption of cynical knowledge in its audience.

Self-importance has been the bogey of Hollywood film-making in the last 20 years or so. Part of this, ironically, may

be discerned as a side effect of Hollywood's post-war liberalism--the urge, fostered by producers, to use cinema for social education. But brave intentions, in the climate of an **industry** produced, and continue to produce, cautious, "right-thinking" films: it shows no great daring to attack the exploitation of the native American by the white man (a la Buffalo Bill and the Indians) in 1976 since almost everybody has read **Bury My Heart At Wounded Knee** anyway. At the same time, studios want, and from a business point of view probably need, to make their movies look important. Unpleasant films are in vogue today and this, no doubt, (besides the fact that the film is artistically well done) is why it won the Cannes film festival award.

Taxi-driver assumes the existence of an audience alert to quirkishness, fancy, those rough edges of personality which the too-careful production likes to iron out. The film, it might be noted, managed to find that audience. But the common currency of America's 'serious' movie-making has been disillusionment. The cinema of social awareness, which Hollywood's has always been, has turned inwards; the dream factory has gone over to the mass-produced nightmare.

The star as victim, as someone with a softer shell than the rest of us; the star as misfit--society finds, unfailingly, the particular symbol it needs.

The danger, however, is this: the sadistic violence that once belonged only to the gangster and was punished, is now commonly unpunished and often undefeated, allowing us to find a sort of "confirmation" of our fantasies. Movies convey "actualized dreams". The film is, in a very real way, an environment we put on. In film we do not learn, we **experience**. Values communicated by films are interiorized and become part of us. Our fantasies are embodied as well as distorted. False realities are shaped. Films unconsciously and consciously define and reflect us. If the film changes us, it is because we have done it to ourselves by opening ourselves to their experiences.

We must reflect on our film experiences. We must get into the habit of critically discussing films we see. We must learn about the medium and its language, how it is used. We must demand substance. We must make substance.

A mind not to be changed by place or time.

The mind is its own place, and in itself can make a heav'n of hell, a hell of heav'n.

Paradise Lost, Book I. 253
John Milton

HARD-SELL IS BACK

| | |
|------------|--|
| <i>Plo</i> | <i>Cute advertisements</i> |
| <i>pPl</i> | <i>With clever advisements</i> |
| <i>opF</i> | <i>Are out, so they tell me,</i> |
| <i>izz</i> | <i>My friend.</i> |
| <i>Fiz</i> | <i>Now it's catch little ditties</i> |
| <i>zOh</i> | <i>About cat food for kitties,</i> |
| <i>Wha</i> | <i>Or how stomach upset you should mend.</i> |
| <i>tta</i> | <i>Vanity repetitious</i> |
| <i>Rel</i> | <i>And very ambitious</i> |
| <i>ief</i> | <i>They urge me to "buy" or to "send."</i> |
| <i>Iti</i> | <i>But I honestly tell you</i> |
| <i>sPl</i> | <i>Rather than sell you,</i> |
| <i>opP</i> | <i>They bore you</i> |
| <i>lop</i> | <i>To no end.</i> |

-Dave Groenenboom

PURPOSE

by Hank Vlaardingerbroek

Ecclesiastes 3:1-11

What good am I? Here I hang in surrender. A season of growing for nothing. All my friends feel the same way, fellow kernels imprisoned in this jungle of leaves and stalks. Limply hanging, unrebelling, wondering, waiting, drying.

But wait! I hear the crashing rustle and drone of something foreign. My stalk is being cut, I'm being thrown, rattled, separated from my friends, spit from a pipe and into a large wagon with millions of other naked, unrelenting, bewildered toothlike kernels.

Now what? Hanging on the stalk I felt useless yet now I'm caught up in the excitement of movement, travelling to

some unknown. A jolting wagon takes us across a rutted, bare field--dotted now only with beige stalks. Then through a crack of a rotted board, the field turns into a smooth black road and our bouncy ride turns into a smooth hum. We complained of not having a purpose while hanging on the stalk and yet now, all piled up, no one has anything to say.

Ahead are large, fat-looking, round shiny houses. From the wagon we feel our selves falling, rotated along through a dark auger and finally again spit on to a large pile of fellow yellow-bellies in a dark, dry, dusty bin.

I had lots to talk about now: new friends, new places, new ideas and new

futures. But what are those futures? No one here knows because once someone leaves, he never returns to tell us about the "beyond" down the dark hole into which they fell. I didn't have long to think about it because like a sled on new fallen snow, I felt myself sliding down toward the pit into which I had watched my friends disappear so many times before. Rolling, bumping, tumbling down I went into the pit. Was this leading to some sort of purpose? A meaning for my living?

The noise became greater, a sort of grinding noise. I could hear human voices. Voices I hadn't listened to since I had been cultivated so many months ago. Then I had been told to grow--now the beating blades below me were going to cut me all up. Slowly I was falling into those rotating, whirling hunks of steel, downward, downward.

The voices became louder now and the last thing I heard before being engulfed and mixed was, "That sure is good corn, Gerald, those hogs will really grow fat on all that protein."

The Impasse

*Stifling heat . . .
yet a wakeful ladybug shuffles over a crackling
cabbage leaf.
The scavenger stopped her searching to watch
chase and
capture marauding moonlight;
laughed when black
looped white through the backyard filigree,
and eavesdropped when tangled branches bantered delightedly
about shadowy lores
and reveries, whispering
generations of unvoiced frightened schemes and fantasies,
breathing hypnotic possibilities.
One grizzled man cleared his throat and startled the clamour
into
silence.
From the inside of a sagging screen door, he determined
the world
was carelessly and contentedly resting.
Self-assured, he locked the door and dreamed confusedly
about
tomorrow's responsibilities.
A wakeful ladybug settled under the fold of a crackling
cabbage leaf.
She paused patiently.
The lice would come.
They always came.*

HAROLD CONT'D

"We must do something!" exclaimed a well-preened young female. The other owls agreed, so four of them carried the unconscious Harold to a warm nest, where the lady owls cleaned him up and put his damaged wing in a splint.

A few hours later Harold came around. The night was dark, but Harold could see, or sense, that there were sets of eyes all around, staring at him. He felt the strange weight on his wing, and the fresh straw poked his underbelly where the fuzz had been scratched away. He was a very frightened young owl. He called out in his most daring voice, "Who, who, who are you?"

The other owls were quite relieved to hear Harold speak, and they all began chirping at once about how they had found Harold, the half-dead owl. Eventually Harold figured out what had happened. He cocked his head from side to side, slumped even farther down in his warm nest, and moaned, "Oh, what a silly goos I have been."

Thus began the rise of blind Harold, recorded in the annals of the Animal Kingdom as the wisest of all creatures, ruler of all the beasts of the earth, from whose reign is taken the phrase, "Wise as an owl."



SANCTUARY — ALI by Dan Van Heyst

Gray radiators
talking to themselves
in empty rooms —
yellowed broken glass
in rotted frames
weeping openly
with the rain —

I have not forgotten you
as others have.
you are my kin,
the place of my working out
of satisfaction.
Empty rooms,
lonely visions,
and sorrowful sounds
you are my secret brothers —
the silent sockets
of my inner eye.

-Bonnie Kuipers

DAWN

the sun rose,
wrapped in a misty blanket,
waking in a misty blanket,
the shadows behind this tree.

THE VILLAIN

The sun rose on the
edge of the perfect blue,
chasing the shadows and
melting the frost into dew.

-Ronda Ruisch

WOUNDED PROPHETS

A true prophet —
words spill forth
as sparse as they are full.
I never
comprehen
his sad smile
eloquently saying
the words
were from someone else —
only one summer
counting dreamy pearls,
sharpened orbs of white
on a lazy moment
did I see the skirts of red
slowly taint the white,
they were too fierce with blood
to ignore:

these prophets are seeking
and their tongues of silver blood
stir venom in the silken waters.

-Bonnie Kuipers

A DAY AT THE JOB

There is no soft rhyme
to capture the nonsynchronous
beating
of the hammer on nails.
No lyric song to be found
in the sole grate of scaffolds
banging their clumsy protest
at each disassembly and at every
new task.

No word to quite describe
the joy of racing adrenalin,
running its hardest
to alert every nerve to the
strength possessed
and the command to use it.

No trite moral to provide a sermon
that will never quite explain
how much I love Jesus
with every building I've nailed ~~into~~
into existence.

It is as rough a kind of fun
as the cedar boards are splintered
and beautiful.
The coarse kind of fun
when I joke with my brother
working with me
nails my praise to heaven.

-Neil Culbertson